

15 Words 15c Farmer Classified Ads Phone 1208

1917?

By
EDWIN BALMER

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(Continued.)

How strange was war! The news that the Geresi was lost with almost all her crew had brought to Bob exultation, triumph; yet, in the wild maelstrom of the sea off Cape Hatteras, his countrymen were risking their lives in little boats to save a score of that crew—that crew who in the morning had shelled Virginia Beach. And, likely enough, inside the Hatteras keys, or in protected waters elsewhere, the enemy submarines were waiting out the storm, or along the coast they were lurking on shelves of sand a hundred feet below the surface. Well, at least tonight they could not strike, and the regent's air craft also must be useless. But was not the gale beginning to lessen? There was no doubt of it; and through the clouds to the east there was showing the gray of dawn.

Nellie Wendell, on her knees by the window of her room in her father's house at Elgin, saw the dawn. The news had come in the evening that the ships from Hampton Roads had been engaged. They had driven off and damaged several of the enemy's ships. Nellie did not know certainly upon which of the American ships Bob was. She was not certain, indeed, that he was upon any of them, but she believed he had been in the battle. The bulletin which came to Elgin gave no account of American casualties; so, as she waited for more definite word, she prayed—as those who wait must often pray—in perfectly irrational petition. She prayed that her husband had not been killed. Of course if he was killed, he was killed, and prayer could not alter that; but thus that night Nellie had prayed as girls and women like her were praying in ten thousand homes.

With the dawn strangely there came to her faith that her husband still was safe. So convinced was she of it, somehow, that she bent her head in an utterance of thanksgiving to God for having brought her husband through the battle; then, humbly, fervently, she petitioned that he still might be spared. How empty and strange the big house was! Bob was away, of course; Jim also was gone. The door of his room stood open. He was with his regiment in Chicago, where there were terrible mobs and rioting, the bulletins said. Troops had fired and had been fired upon; bombs had been thrown and many militiamen killed. Was it possible that Jim might have been in greater danger that night than Bob?

CHAPTER XIII.

A Letter From Nellie.

NELLIE'S mother was alone in her room. Nathan Ashby was away. He was no longer in the jail, under arrest; Sibert of the secret service had succeeded in showing that Ashby's connection with Hoffman was without significance and that he knew nothing of the doings of Ingouff and Enloe at the works. Nathan Ashby had been released to go east for conference with officials of the National Arms company.

Thus it was to Nellie and her mother alone with the maids in the big house that news came during the day that the Geresi of the enemy had been wrecked off Cape Hatteras after having been damaged in battle. In the afternoon mail there arrived, much delayed, a letter which Bob had scribbled on the train and mailed in Ohio the morning after he left. It told her nothing of where he was to go. He did not mention even if he had received more definite orders. It told her only of his thought and his love for her. She clasped it close and wrote to him at once again. She had written twice already, addressing him in care of the navy yard, Norfolk.

That night—although publication of the movements of American ships had been sternly forbidden—it was known that the scattered American squadrons had succeeded in concentrating during the great storm without serious encounters with the enemy. It was known that a division of the new American dreadnaughts, steaming by night through the hurricane, had surprised and driven off a detail of the regent's Carthage battle cruisers and Sargons which had attempted to cut off and destroy a squadron of American battleships racing up from the gulf. And so the next day arrived the intelligence that the American first and second battle fleets were gathered in a fleet and must move soon for the great battle with the enemy.

On the morning of the fifth day Nellie heard, for the second time, from Bob. As before, the letter was all about her; nothing about himself, except that he was on the Arizona. She understood that he could not tell more, but the letter half-maddened her by its eloquence of what she had to know—had to know about him—and what it could so easily have told. He had received one letter from her and was happy for it; where he got it, and how, he did not tell, nor was there postmark or other indication of where his letter was mailed. She read the dear lines of his writing over and over again, and she was at her mother's desk and was writing again to him when—

inside the door and then started back. Nellie turned and saw Agnes, and at the sight of Agnes' face Nellie was on her feet, cold and trembling.

"What is it?" she cried.

"Nothing," Agnes denied in panic. "I wasn't looking for you. I was looking for Mrs. Ashby; I'm going."

But Nellie caught her. "Something's happened, Agnes," she cried tensely. "You've heard something. What is it? Something about Jim?"

"No, Nellie! The fleets are fighting! They're—they've been fighting since 2 o'clock. All our ships and all of the regent's fleet are fighting, they say. They're off the New Jersey coast, out of sight of land, but they can hear the guns ashore!"

Nellie's eyes gazed through and through Agnes. "That"—her lips steeled and she went on—"that is all you know?"

"That's all, I swear."

Nellie gazed at the clock. It was after 3; the great battle by that time must be over. She stared down dizzily at the letter, almost finished. She sat down again at the desk, and as one in a trance she added two lines and wrote her name below them; then she sealed the letter and stamped it.

"We'll mail this on the way," she said quietly to Agnes. "I'm going with you to where they'll get the reports first."

"A strange experience came to me that night," said Nellie's letter, which Bob had received last before the fleet put to sea for the great battle. "It was the night, dear, of the hurricane on the coast, and I knew that you had been in battle. I was taken with terror for you; I am confessing it. I was on my knees by the window of the room which had been our bedroom, praying in desperation. Bob, I lost all control of myself. I was so afraid! Then the thing came, my husband; a vision! It was not a dream, for I was wide awake—only alone in the dark, just before dawn. I was looking toward the east, where you were, and I saw you and knew that you were safe. There was something strange about it which I could not understand at all; but it told me you were safe. More than that, it told me you would still be safe. You see . . . It was very strange, Bob. I saw it again last night, as I was sleeping that time, and it was very clear. So you are coming back to me; I will see you again—that I know. God has promised it to me."

Bob put down the letter with the others which he had read and locked them all away in his desk. It was time for him to be up on deck.

"Ships in column!" the signal was flying from the masts of the new Idaho, which led the American line. The Arizona, second in power only to the Idaho, was taking position in column 500 yards behind; astern the Arizona, as Bob saw when he gazed back, the sister superdreadnaught Pennsylvania was placing herself third. The Oklahoma, Nevada, New York and Texas steamed next in order; then two older dreadnaughts, the Arkansas and Wyoming, followed by the Florida, the Utah, Delaware and North Dakota.

These completed the roll of the dreadnaughts—the first line battleships



"Nellie, the fleets are fighting!"

of the United States; but, astern them, the column of ships still stretched, the Michigan and South Carolina, the New Hampshire, Kansas and twelve more of the old, pre-dreadnaught vessels of the second line. Five more such vessels might have been there, Bob knew, but their fighting value would be even less than the weakest in the line and they would have taken a knot from the speed of the fleet. As it was, the column could do no better than eighteen knots; it was steaming at sixteen now, letting the light cruisers and destroyers dash ahead to watch the waters for drifting mines and for submarines. Air craft circled overhead; some of the scouting were bringing back to the flagship intelligence of the enemy's strength and disposition. The American fleet was steering north and east.

The van of the regent's fleet had just come in sight, steaming in a line, also, and west. The regent's ships seemed to be in column, too—in a line appearing almost parallel to the American column, but really slanting a little, so that the two columns, in battle formation, approached each other slowly. There were but twenty-two ships of the line in the other column, against the American twenty-nine; but every vessel in the European line was a dreadnaught. Their order, as reported by the air craft, was repeated to the officers on the Arizona's quarterdeck. Six Trajans led, the four Phenixes followed; six Sargons steamed next; then the four superdreadnaughts of the Zeus class; the two Thors were last. With twelve twelve-inch guns each and with a speed of twenty-one knots, the Thors were the weakest and the slowest in the European column. Four great battle cruisers stood off to the

as reserve; and the European destroyers, double in number to the American, darted ahead and abeam of the battle line.

It was a quarter to 3, ship's time, when the Idaho signaled to the column to alter course, and the flagship sheered a little to the left; the Arizona, steering straight to the point where the Idaho sheered, altered its helm likewise, and the rest of the fleet followed. The tops of the Trajan—the flagship of the regent's line—were in plain sight, with the tops of the Xerxes, Varon and Floron following. With their superior speed they were attempting to gain position across the van of the American line and rake the leading ships; so the American column was changing course to keep the enemy on the beam. The two columns steamed on almost parallel, therefore, but still gradually converging and bringing the leading vessels of each line within range.

The day was bright, and the sun, high in sky, gave little favor to the gunners of either fleet—what favor there was lay with the Americans. The sun glared down into the water and disclosed to the observers in the hydroplanes of both sides the movement of submarines. The guns of destroyers clattered continuously as the craft darted back and forth on their charges for the protection of the battleships. But the destroyers of the two sides did not seek duels; only the aeroplanes hurried to engage before the battle and drive their opponents from the sky.

The conditions were almost perfect for battle in which gun power—the ability of the great turreted fighting ships to give and to take—must decide. Mile after mile the battleships extended. As Bob Wendell gazed back along the line of American ships, when the Arizona turned after the Idaho, only the tops of the Missouri, the Georgia and the Connecticut marked the end of the American line. The Connecticut was eight miles back, almost as far away as the Trajan. Now the American column was slowing a little to let the weaker ships at the rear close up, so that two of the Connecticut class could engage each of the Zeus and the Thor.

For a moment, therefore, Bob was on the deck breathing the glorious cool air, seeing the sweep of the sea, the mighty panoply of ships, and hearing the sound of the water rushing at the vessel's side. Would his reins tingle again at breath from such a breeze? The alarm bells were sounding; the bugles were blowing: "Battle stations!"

The breeze brought the notes of the bugle back from the Idaho, as the wind was bearing the call of the Arizona's trumpets to the Pennsylvania, and so all down the line. Bob Wendell was no longer himself—no longer the all important figure in a girl's vision, the dream of a dream whose life must be spared. He was at his post in No. 2 turret of the second battleship in the American column about to fight for the victory of the western world. In the telescope through which he gazed he saw reflected the image of the tops of the Xerxes—the second ship in the regent's line—which the Arizona was to engage and which was to engage the Arizona in the battle which now was begun. A great keyser of spray 500 yards short and astern the Idaho told the Trajan had opened; almost simultaneously the Xerxes tested the range.

"Commence firing!"

(To Be Continued.)



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The will of John Garrick Hannah, head of several coal companies, who died on Aug. 9 last while riding in his automobile, disposed of an estate of more than \$100,000.

The will of Thomas L. James, Postmaster-General under President Garfield, was admitted to probate at Hackensack, N. J. He left an estate valued at \$1,000,000.

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